

COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION

WORKING GROUP

RECOMMENDATIONS

PURSUANT TO

EXECUTIVE ORDER 49

INTRODUCTION

Governor Ruth Ann Minner through Executive Order 49 created the Community Notification Working Group (hereinafter referred to as “CNWG”) to provide written recommendations concerning the following:

- 1.) Registration of sex offenders who have committed their offenses in other states;
- 2.) Possible separate listing of registered juveniles on the State’s Sex Offender Registry Web Site;
- 3.) Improvements in enforcement of reporting compliance;
- 4.) Refinement of tier definitions in order to ensure that placement in a particular tier accurately reflects the degree of risk that an individual presents to the community;
- 5.) Possible expansion of information made available on the Sex Offender Registry Web Site; and
- 6.) Possible treatment models for child sexual abuse offenders.

The CNWG, composed of members having an interest in different aspects of community notification, worked diligently creating the recommendations that follow. It is important to recognize that the main purpose of community notification is to provide the citizens of Delaware with information so they can protect themselves and their families from becoming victims of sexual crimes.

The members of the CNWG believe that efforts must be made by the State to fully enlighten the citizens of Delaware as to the resources available to protect against sexual crimes. The CNWG hopes that after recommendations regarding the Sex Offender Registry Web Site are implemented, the State will embark upon a public awareness campaign to inform the citizens of Delaware about the available resources.

As community notification is essential to the protection of the citizens of Delaware and whereas there is a need to ensure that efforts are always made to increase the ability of our state to provide greater information regarding community notification, the CNWG recommends that a permanent committee¹ is created that will monitor and make recommendations annually regarding community notification in the State of Delaware.

¹ The CNWG recommends that the following individuals should be standing members on the committee. 1.) a representative from the Department of Safety and Homeland Security 2.) a representative from the Division of State Police, State Bureau of Identification 3.) a representative from the Department of Education 4.) a representative from the Department of Services for Children, Youth and their Families 5.) a representative from the Department of Justice 6.) a representative from the Department of Corrections 6.) a public member.

REGISTRATION OF SEX OFFENDERS WHO HAVE COMMITTED THEIR OFFENSES IN OTHER STATES

The relevant sections of the Delaware Code concerning sex offenders who commit offenses in other states are found in 11 Del. C. §4120 and state the following:

(e)(1) Any person convicted of any offense specified in the laws of another state, the United States or any territory of the United States which is the same as, or equivalent to, any of the offenses set forth in § 4121(a)(4) of this title, and who is a permanent or temporary resident of the State on the date of his or her conviction shall register as a sex offender within 7 business days of conviction, unless the person is confined in a penal institution located outside the State at the time of conviction, in which case the person shall register as a sex offender within seven business days of his or her first return to the State of Delaware after release from custody. Any such person shall register at a designated Delaware State Police facility, and the Delaware State Police shall be deemed to be the registering agency.

(2) Any person convicted of any offense specified in the laws of another state, the United States or any territory of the United States which is the same as, or equivalent to, any of the offenses set forth in § 4121(a)(4) of this title, who is not a permanent or temporary resident of the State on the date of his or her conviction, and who thereafter becomes a permanent or temporary resident of the State shall register as a sex offender within 7 business days of establishing permanent or temporary residency within the State. Any such person shall register at a designated Delaware State Police facility, and the Delaware State Police shall be deemed to be the registering agency.

If a person is convicted of an offense in another state and placed on probation in that state, as long as that person is on probation and complying with registration requirements, Delaware's Department of Corrections will be contacted by that state's correction/probation department prior to the person entering Delaware. This is required under the interstate compact for the supervision of adult offenders of which Delaware is a participant. This is found in the Delaware Code at 11 Del. C. § 4358. Currently in the

United States, all fifty states are participants in the interstate compact for the supervision of adult offenders.

The problem arises, however, if a sex offender is no longer on probation in another state or is failing to comply with probation in another state and moves to Delaware. In this scenario, the other state's probation/correction office would not notify the appropriate agency in Delaware because that person is no longer on probation or is not in compliance with reporting requirements. This is a very difficult scenario to manage. Unless the person recognizes Delaware law and registers as a sex offender, the State of Delaware will not know that person is in Delaware.

The CNWG, in analyzing this scenario, looked at ways that this person might be identified. The CNWG looked at where this person might have contact with our state. The places of contact that the CNWG identified are the Division of Motor Vehicles, the Division of Revenue, employers, homeless shelters, and utility companies.

Through our discussions, the Division of Motor Vehicles emerged as the logical place to determine if a person is a sex offender from another state. Every person who moves to Delaware and drives a motor vehicle is supposed to obtain a State of Delaware Driver's License within 60 days. In addition, the Division of Motor Vehicles issues identification cards to those without a driver's license who need documentation to establish residency. An out of state sex offender could be identified if the Division of Motor Vehicles had the ability to run a check against the National Crime Information Center (hereinafter referred to as "NCIC") database. NCIC in its databank maintains data regarding registered sex offenders throughout the United States. In addition to NCIC, a system called Victim Information and Notification Everyday (hereinafter referred to as

“VINE”), which is a victim notification system currently used in 27 states, could augment NCIC to concurrently check for sex offenders. The CNWG recommends the consideration of the use of NCIC and VINE for the purpose of identifying out of state sex offenders who apply for driver’s licenses and identification cards at the Division of Motor Vehicles.

The CNWG recognizes our recommendation will not capture all out of state sex offenders who have failed to register. There will be sex offenders from out of state who are going to avoid governmental contact as they are avoiding recognition. However, the CNWG believes our recommendation if implemented will have an impact in identifying sex offenders from out of state.

POSSIBLE SEPARATE LISTING OF REGISTERED JUVENILES ON THE STATE’S SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY WEB SITE

The CNWG examined the concept of having a separate listing of juveniles on the sex offender registry. In the research that the CNWG performed there were very few states that list delinquent juveniles on their sex offender registry web sites. The CNWG while being asked to consider a separate listing of registered juveniles thought it was important to also consider whether juveniles should be eliminated entirely from the Sex Offender Registry Web Site.

The CNWG after thoughtful discussion and consideration, does not recommend that Delaware create a separate listing of juveniles on our Sex Offender Registry Web Site. The CNWG has concerns that if a separate list for juveniles is created, the juveniles

listed may be targeted for the wrong reasons. The CNWG does not see any positive aspect to a separate listing.

The CNWG also does not recommend that juveniles be eliminated from the Sex Offender Registry Web Site. The CNWG believes it is important to know when any sex offender is in a community so parents can identify any potential threat to their children. While the CNWG discussed whether the pictures of juveniles should be eliminated, it was determined that, as with adult offenders, the pictures of juveniles should remain on the Sex Offender Registry Web Site. The pictures are important as they allow a parent to easily identify a particular sex offender, adult or juvenile.

The CNWG recognizes that placing a juvenile on a sex offender registry can have a significant impact on that juvenile's life. The CNWG evaluated whether a juvenile placed on the sex offender registry should have the opportunity to be removed from the sex offender registry at an earlier point than is currently dictated by the Delaware Code if a licensed provider (i.e., psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker) with expertise in treating sex offenders, who has treated that juvenile can demonstrate that the juvenile has clearly benefited from treatment and clinically does not pose an additional risk to society. The CNWG recommends that a separate task force be convened to explore the necessity and feasibility of designing a procedure or system that would possibly allow a juvenile to be removed from the registry following successful completion of treatment, a specified amount of time after sentencing without any further adjudication, expert opinion, and further judicial review.

IMPROVEMENTS IN ENFORCEMENT OF REPORTING COMPLIANCE

The CNWG looked at the enforcement of reporting compliance. The current system does provide for enforcement if a sex offender is not reporting. Many of the individuals who are on the sex offender registry in the State of Delaware are on probation. The Department of Correction's probation office has a sex offender unit in each county to supervise those offenders on probation with registration requirements. If a sex offender who is on probation fails to properly report, their probation can be violated. The violation of probation process is an effective enforcement tool that is used by probation officers. If a sex offender is not on probation and is not reporting, the law enforcement agency for that jurisdiction where the sex offender last resided or where he/she is known to reside is notified by the Division of State Police, State Bureau of Identification upon that sex offender failing to report. While it appears that law enforcement officers pursue these offenders after notification, the CNWG recommends that the Division of State Police establish a procedure to review the progress of law enforcement in locating sex offenders who fail to comply with reporting requirements. The CNWG recognizes the fiscal impact that this recommendation may place upon the Division of State Police and believes it should not be imposed unless the necessary resources are available to effectuate the recommendation.

The CNWG believes that the designation of a sex offender as "homeless" also creates numerous difficulties in enforcement of reporting requirements. Under our sex offender statute it provides:

(1) Notwithstanding any law, rule or regulation to the contrary, if after the exercise of due diligence by the sex offender, the offender is unable to secure an

anticipated place of future residence, for the purposes of this subsection the offender shall be designated as "homeless." The term "homeless" shall also include any person who anticipates a future place of residence in or at any temporary homeless shelter or other similar place of temporary residence. The fact that a sex offender has secured an anticipated place of future residence at a homeless shelter or other similar place of temporary residence shall be reported by the court or agency having custody of the offender, along with the name and address of the shelter or residence as required by subsections (i) and (j) of this section, but such information shall not be included in any public notification required or permitted by subsection (j) or subsection (k) of this section, except that such information shall be provided to the agency, organization or entity having supervisory or operational authority over such shelter or similar place of temporary residence. Upon securing a temporary or permanent residence, such homeless offender shall comply with the re-registration provisions of this section and § 4120 of this title.

The designation as homeless allows for potential abuse by a sex offender. As there is not a specified address where a sex offender is located, it could allow for the sex offender to avoid recognition in a community. The CNWG recommends that a person who is homeless be required to report to the Division of State Police on a monthly or weekly basis no matter what the individual's tier level. While the homeless person may not be able to identify his/her residence, the CNWG also recommends that the sex offender must provide a specified geographic area in which he/she will be staying.

Lastly, the CNWG recommends that sex offenders placed on Tier II must report at least every 6 months as opposed to the current one year mandatory reporting requirement that is in place. The CNWG believes that due to the seriousness of Tier II offenses an individual should be required to report twice a year.

REFINEMENT OF TIER DEFINITIONS IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT PLACEMENT IN A PARTICULAR TIER ACCURATELY REFLECTS THE DEGREE OF RISK THAT AN INDIVIDUAL PRESENTS TO THE COMMUNITY

The CNWG looked at the current tier definitions in order to ensure that placement in a tier accurately reflects the degree of risk that an individual presents to the community. Delaware's tiering system is based upon an offense based system. In other words, the legislature has determined that convictions for certain offenses shall place a person in a particular tier. The current system has a means for the prosecutor to increase the tier level of an offender upon conviction by petitioning the court. Our current tier system replaced our prior system in 1997. The prior system of tiering was done through a risk assessment scale that was completed by the Department of Justice and based upon certain criteria.

The current system of tiering places individuals in one of three tiers based upon the severity of the offense as determined by the legislature. The relevant section of the Delaware Code is found at 11 Del.C. §4121(e). The significance of the tiers is that upon placement in Tier II or III a person is placed on the Sex Offender Registry Web Site. Additionally the tier level determines the amount of time a person must register as a sex offender. The Delaware Code currently provides that if a person is a Tier III offender that person must register as a sex offender for the rest of his/her life. If a person is a Tier I or Tier II offender that person must register for 15 years as a sex offender unless he/she is a repeat offender in which case that person must register for life.

The current system of tiering is conservative in that it ensures that individuals who are convicted of serious offenses are tiered at Level II or III, in addition, it provides

for the ability of the prosecutor to petition the court to increase the tier level of an offender after conviction. The ability of the prosecutor to increase the tier level is needed. For example, cases sometimes have to be pled down to a lesser offense due to weak evidence, concerns for a victim's well being, lack of cooperation of a witness and for other reasons. Additionally, due to limited evidence a jury might find a person guilty of a lesser offense than what he/she was originally charged. These situations allow for the possibility of a more serious sexual offender being placed in a lower tier. This is why the ability of a prosecutor to petition the court for a higher tier designation is important.

The criticism of our current system is that the offense committed does not necessarily always reflect the exact degree of risk that a person poses to the citizens of Delaware. In order to accurately determine what level of risk an individual poses, an evaluation by a psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker with expertise in treating sex offenders needs to be undertaken that considers the sex offender's criminal history and risk factors. Unfortunately, for this to occur, an enormous amount of resources would be needed to evaluate each and every case thoroughly. This of course is the reason the changes were made in 1997. Unless unlimited resources become available, the current system of tiering is an effective way of protecting the public.

After coming to the conclusion that a major overhaul of the current system should not occur, the CNWG examined the current tier definitions to see if minor tweaking should occur in terms of specific offenses placing an individual in a particular tier. The only modification the CNWG recommends is that Possession of Child Pornography be moved from a Tier I offense to a Tier II offense. Possession of Child Pornography is found at 11 Del. C § 1111 and is a Class F Felony. The reason the CNWG makes this

recommendation is the seriousness of the offense, similarity to unlawfully dealing in child pornography which is a Tier II offense and the involvement of children in this offense.

POSSIBLE EXPANSION OF INFORMATION MADE AVAILABLE ON THE SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY WEB SITE

The CNWG examined the State of Delaware's Sex Offender Registry Web Site to determine if the information on the web site should be expanded. In looking at our web site, there are many aspects of it that are very good. Our web site provides the ability to perform searches by name, street, development, city, county, zip code or state in which the sex offense occurred. Upon viewing a page for a person on the web site, it provides the picture, name, address, sex, date of birth, height, weight, race, hair color, skin complexion and eye color of that person. Additionally, it provides whether that person is currently in a Delaware prison, convicted of a sex offense in another state or is a repeat offender. Specific information is also provided about the conviction of the person on the web site. The web site provides the conviction date, the state in which the conviction occurred, the specific statute, description of the conviction, and an approximate range of the victim's age. Lastly, the web site shows the last known employer, address of employer, last known place of study, address of the place of study and the police agency for the jurisdiction in which the sex offender resides.

The CNWG reviewed web sites from all fifty States. After conducting this review and through discussion amongst the CNWG, it was decided that Delaware's Sex

Offender Registry Web Site should include sections that address frequently asked questions, provide links to informational web sites, are specific to parents and caretakers and provide sex offender facts. The CNWG recommends and has developed these sections which are attached. (Attachment A).

The CNWG also discussed the possibility of providing specific conditions of probation on the Sex Offender Registry Web Site regarding each sex offender. While this idea has merit, the CNWG had concerns over the accuracy of this information as conditions imposed by a court or probation officer might be difficult to track and would require continued monitoring.

POSSIBLE TREATMENT MODELS FOR CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE OFFENDERS

The CNWG has looked at and discussed treatment models for adult sexual offenders and youth with sexual behavior problems. In general, the literature and research does not lead us to conclude that any one treatment model fits all types of offenders and for all types of problems. Further, the treatment literature also differentiates those that may benefit from community based treatment versus those clearly needing residential based treatment. Although there are general methodological problems with comparing treatment models across population etc., most of those models deemed successful utilize cognitive-behavioral and behavioral techniques. However, treatment must be geared toward individual problems and issues. Treatment programs, whether residential or community based, absolutely must plan for generalization from the treatment center or office to the individual's natural environment. Clearly, all treatment,

no matter what model, or, for what population, is aimed at rehabilitation and preventing recidivism.

Although not a primary task of the CNWG, the task force wishes to note that there is a serious shortage of treatment providers practicing in the state who specifically work with individuals (adult or juvenile) who sexually act out or offend. It is essential to note that almost all individuals (particularly juveniles) who are sent out of state for treatment will come back to the state to live. Thus, not having adequate follow-up treatment in the community may seriously impact any treatment gains made in residential treatment. Whether treatment is ultimately conducted in a residential or community based setting, this serious provider shortage issue must be further studied, and recommendations be generated to address this issue. The CNWG recommends that the permanent committee referenced previously in this report should perform such study.

William G. Bush, IV, Chair
Community Notification Working Group

ATTACHMENT “A”

Frequently Asked Questions

1.) How many registered sex offenders are there in the State of Delaware? There are 2923 registered sex offenders as of March 4, 2005 in the State of Delaware.

2.) Is there a typical sex offender? No, sex offenders come from all walks of life and socio-economic groups. They can be male or female, rich or poor, employed or unemployed, religious or non-religious, educated or uneducated, and from any race.

3.) What steps should I take to protect my family and myself if an offender moves into our neighborhood? Open communication between parents and children are vital components of family safety. Children might be told in general terms that this person has hurt someone before and that children should stay away from this individual. Families can review safety tips and protective behaviors. Remember that the purpose behind community notification is to reduce the chances of future victimization of people and to avoid situations that might allow for victimization.

4.) Can I tell neighbors, schools or others about a sex offender living in the area? The purpose of community notification and the sex offender registry is to provide information for the protection of the public. Sharing the information is believed to make our communities a safer place to live, and is an activity that is encouraged. Taking any kind of illegal action against a sex offender is another matter that is detrimental to our communities and could lead to legal action against the perpetrator.

5.) Will I automatically be notified if a sex offender is released into my community? No, You can subscribe to receive email notification of sex offenders that are placed on the sex offender registry web site. You can do so by creating an account with the [Delaware Information Subscription Service](#) web site and subscribing to the Sex Offender Notification Subscription. Be aware, however, that the Sex Offender Registry Web Site does not contain every sex offender in Delaware. Individuals who are designated as Tier I sex offenders are not placed on the Sex Offender Registry Web Site.

6.) Does the law prohibit a sex offender from living near a school, day care or playground? Not Always.

7.) Who should I contact if I know the information is incorrect regarding a sex

offender of the Sex Offender Registry Web Site? State Bureau of Identification, Sex Offender Central Registry, P.O. Box 430, Dover, Delaware 19903. Phone:(302) 739-5882. **Email:** soffender@state.de.us

8.)What happens if a sex offender fails to register? Under Title 11, Section 4120(k) of the Delaware Code a person who fails to register has committed a Class G felony. This offense is punishable by up to 2 years in jail.

9.) Is Information about all convicted sex offenders available to the public at the Sexual Offender Registry Web Site? No, only if a court determination is made to place an individual on the Sex Offender Registry Web Site. Individuals who are designated as Tier I sex offenders are not placed on the Sex Offender Registry Web Site.

10.) Are juvenile sex offenders placed on the Sex Offender Registry Web Site? Yes, based on the judicial determination and nature of the offense.

LINKS

Disclaimer: The links provided on this page to other internet sites are intended to be helpful to persons viewing this site. The presence of these links on this site is not intended to be an endorsement of such sites, and unless specifically indicated to the contrary elsewhere on this site, the State of Delaware does not sponsor, or have any affiliation with these organizations. It should be noted that, due to the nature of the topics discussed on these sites, some sites may contain information which some viewers may find uncomfortable or objectionable.

INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD PROTECTION

FBI Crimes Against Children Program – This link is to the FBI’s Crimes Against Children Program. Part of the strategy of this program is to decrease the vulnerability of children to acts of sexual exploitation and abuse. This link provides information and resources.

Klaas Kids Foundation – This link is to the foundation established in the memory of Polly Hannah Klaas with the mission of stopping crimes against children. This link includes information regarding Megan’s law, a description of community notification in all 50 states, safety tips for children and information regarding Amber Alerts.

Megan Nicole Kanka Foundation – This link is to the foundation established in memory of Megan Kanka (Megan’s Law). The foundation wants to ensure that every possible step is taken to help prevent the future victimization of children. This link provides safety tips for children.

Jacob Wetterling Foundation – This link is a foundation established in the memory of Jacob Wetterling with the mission of protecting children from sexual exploitation and abduction. This link provides safety tips for children and other valuable information for protecting children.

Prevent Child Abuse Delaware – This link is to Prevent Child Abuse Delaware which is a private organization devoted to the prevention and treatment of all forms of child abuse and neglect. The mission of Prevent Child Abuse Delaware is to work together with other organizations and individuals to develop programs, services, and resources for the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect in Delaware. The link discusses the available programs that Prevent Child Abuse Delaware offers.

MORE INFORMATIONAL LINKS

Sex Offender Registry Sites in other States. –This link provides access to sex offender registries for other states.

Office on Violence Against Women This link is to the Office on Violence Against Women which handles the U.S. Department of Justice’s legal and policy issues regarding violence against women, coordinates Departmental efforts, provided national and international leadership, receives international visitors interested in learning about the federal government’s role in addressing violence against women, and responds to requests for information regarding violence against women. This link provides awareness information about sexual assault including how to support someone who has been sexually assaulted.

Sex Offender Facts and Characteristics

- In 2001, there were approximately 386,000 registered sex offenders in the United States.
- As of March 4, 2005, Delaware has 2923 registered sex offenders.
- Sex offenders come from all walks of life and from socio-economic groups. They can be male or female, rich or poor, employed or unemployed, religious or non-religious, educated or uneducated, and from any race. There is no thing as a typical “sex offender.”
- Although some sex offenders are strangers and stalkers, most know the victim as a family member, friend, or neighbor.
- Studies of victims have found very few sex crimes are reported to law enforcement. Young victims who know or are related to the perpetrator are least likely to report the crime to authorities.

PARENTS AND CARETAKERS

Talking to Children About Abuse

This is not an easy subject. Child Abuse is a very serious issue that parents/caregivers need to discuss with their children in order to decrease the child's risk for victimization. It is important for adults to be objective and matter of fact in conversation. Explain to the child that you are having this discussion because you are concerned with maintaining their safety. During your discussion be open to what the child says and take their questions and concerns seriously. Be honest. If you don't know an answer to a question say so and offer to get the information. Provide information and ask questions in an age appropriate way that educates the child without overwhelming him/her. In order to facilitate conversation you could discuss the following with your child.

Items for Discussion

- Review safety rules for your home, tell your child not to answer the door when you are not at home, establish a plan for answering the phone when they are alone or have them use the answering machine to screen calls.
- Make a list with your child of three safe grown-ups he/she can talk to if he/she is afraid or in trouble and you are not there.
- Talk to your child about what places are safe to visit in your community and which are not.
- Review with your child the four private places, which are the mouth, the breasts, the genitalia, and the buttocks, explain that no one should touch these places unless they are helping keep the child healthy (e.g examination by a doctor) or clean (e.g. bathing).
- Encourage your child to tell you if someone talks to or touches him/her in a way that makes them feel bad or that he/she doesn't like.
- Encourage open discussion with your child about his/her willingness to talk to the grown-ups in your family about the things that bother him/her.
- Determine if your child knows that the grown-ups in your family will listen to him/her. Ask yourself honestly if this is true. Do you and other adults in your family really listen to the children in your care?
- Tell your child that it is not the child's fault if someone tries to bother him/her or touch him/her in a way that they don't like.

- Let your child know how special you think they are, encourage him/her to think of themselves as a person worthy of respect, who also respects others. Treat and talk with your child in a way that conveys your respect

Key Points

Personal rights: Children's bodies are their own and no one may touch them without their permission unless there is good reason (e.g., health, safety).

Feelings: Encourage children to talk about their feelings with the adults in their lives, especially feelings of hurt or fright.

Safe People: Children need to know to whom they can go if someone is bothering or frightening them. Safe people are people who they know, who are trustworthy, who listen to them, and will believe them.

Unsafe People: Parent/caregivers should never tell their children that only strangers can harm them. Unfortunately in nine out of ten cases, the offender is someone the victim knows.

Blamelessness: Children need to know and be told repeatedly that being abused or assaulted is never their fault.

(Prevent Child Abuse Delaware)

MY EIGHT RULES FOR SAFETY

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has developed 8 rules that parents can teach children in order to help keep them safe. These rules are:

- 1.) Before I go anywhere, I always check first with my parents or the person in charge. I tell them where I am going, how I will get there, who will be going with me, and when I'll be back.
- 2.) I check first for permission from my parents before getting into a car or leaving with anyone -- even someone I know. I check first before changing plans or accepting money, gifts, or drugs without my parents' knowledge.

- 3.) It is safer for me to be with other people when going places or playing outside. I always use the "buddy system."
- 4.) I say NO if someone tries to touch me in ways that make me feel frightened, uncomfortable, or confused. Then I go and tell a grown-up I trust what happened.
- 5.) I know it is not my fault if someone touches me in a way that is not O.K. I don't have to keep secrets about those touches.
- 6.) I trust my feelings and talk to grown-ups about problems that are too big for me to handle on my own. A lot of people care about me and will listen and believe me. I am not alone.
- 7.) It is never too late to ask for help. I can keep asking until I get the help I need.
- 8.) I am a special person, and I deserve to feel safe.

(National Center for Missing and Exploited Children)

WARNING SIGNS THAT ABUSE MAY HAVE OCCURRED

Parents/caregivers should talk to their children every day. Adults should be familiar with their children's behaviors so that they can quickly identify any changes which may be warning signs that a child is being threatened or actually abused. Although not definite signs that a child is being abused some of the most common warning signals are:

Self-destructive behavior
Withdrawn or aggressive behavioral extremes
Trouble sleeping
Problems with peers
Sudden substantial weight change
Sudden school difficulties
Inappropriate sex play

Again, the presence of one or more of these characteristics should heighten your concern but does not automatically indicate that abuse has occurred. If a child displays any of these warning signals, then parents/caregivers should take action. If you believe your child has been abused contact the police or Division of Family Services.

(Prevent Child Abuse Delaware)

IF YOUR CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE

Your reaction is extremely important to the child's emotional health and recovery. The following suggestions may be useful if a child discloses abuse:

Remain calm, do not panic or overreact.

Believe him or her.

Reassure the child that telling you was the right thing to do-tell him/her that you are proud of him/her for telling.

Call the police or Division of Family Services immediately.

Do not blame the child.

Do not criticize the child or yell at him/her.

Do not pressure the child to talk or avoid talking about the abuse. Let the child disclose information at his or her pace.

Do not challenge the child with "Why" questions.

Do not confront the offender.

Dealing with abuse can be an overwhelming and scary situation; consider support and/or counseling for you and your child.

(Prevent Child Abuse Delaware)

